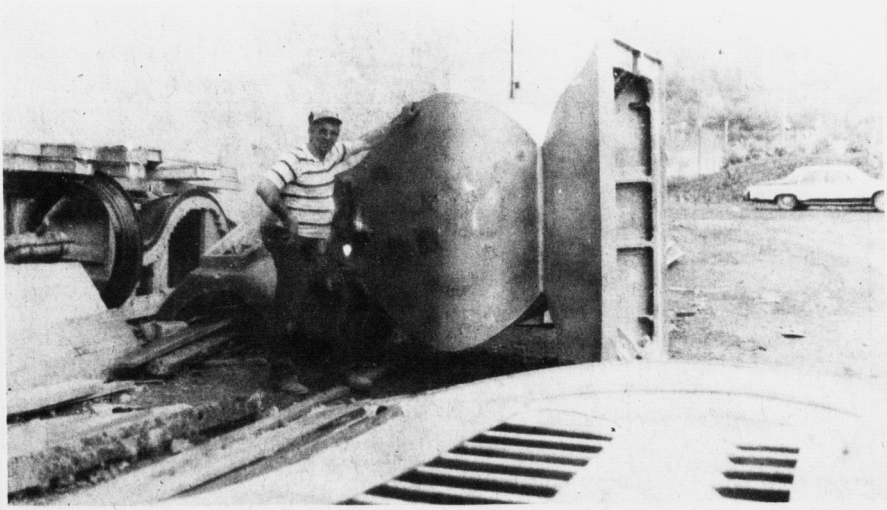

MANY COMPANIES have been severely hit by the recession, but Carbondale's Norfib plant keeps busy making products like the church steeple pictured above.

New Carbondale company produces fiberglass church steeples and belfries

By BARBARA WROBLESKI

Soaring belfries and domes, ornamental moldings and window casings and other vital features of churches are created in fiberglass in a relatively new Carbondale company called Nor-Fib, 175 South Church Street. Its president and founder, Carbondale's Frank Emmett, enjoys his work, and although all types of fiberglass items can be manufactured at his plant, he has chosen to specialize in church architectural products.

The businessman noted that his family is the only one in the country that manufactures and installs fiberglass items for churches.

Although Emmett has been involved in fiberglass work for about 18 years, it was only last June that he opened his own facility. Prior to that time, he'd visited numerous fiberglass companies to learn the business and gradually began making fiberglass products in small rented garages.

Helping Emmett get his business off to a good start are his brothers Jack and Vince who reside with him in an apartment on the plant's upper floor. The three brothers and a handful of employees designed and constructed the plant building themselves, and pursue job contracts from churches throughout the country.

The company is now making domes for St. John the Baptist Russian Orthodox Church, Mayfield, and for St. Michael's Church, Dunmore. Some repair work will be done soon at Berean Baptist Church.

In addition to its specialization in church work, Emmett explained that his business in unique in that "we rent cranes to remove and install domes and all other large pieces on the churches. This saves the parishes the trouble of hiring another company to do demolition and another to install the new pieces."

Once the dome, belfry or other architectural feature is removed from a church building, it's taken to the plant where work begins to make an exact duplicate of the piece in fiberglass.

The first step in making the duplicate is to take its measurements and draw up blueprints to scale, Emmett noted. "Then we build a wooden frame or skeleton, the size of a quarter section of the piece to be duplicated," Emmett explained.

The wooden framework is then covered with sheet rock, then with a layer of formica or other smooth covering. Next it's covered with fiberglass and sprayed with plastic resins in the colors selected by the customer, Emmett related. Once all four sections of the dome are completed, they are bolted together and the joints are sealed.

Emmett stated that fiberglass lasts almost indefinitely, pointing out that fiberglass PT-boats used during World War II are still afloat today. Church parts made of wood, copper and bronze do deteriorate, but fiberglass pieces are equally beautiful and won't rust or rot. They don't require painting either, Emmett said, since the colors won't fade.

Other architectural items like moldings, decorative details and louvered belfries can be duplicated by spraying fiberglass directly onto the original piece to make a cast, and then spraying fiberglass into the cast to get an exact copy of the original item.